

THE BIBLE AND ARCHAEOLOGY; FRIENDS OR FOES?

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The Hebrew Bible stood as the solitary survivor from the cultures of the ancient Near East until about 150 years ago and its witness was unchallenged. Then the application of analytical techniques to the text led many to conclude its testimony was unreliable, its statements often had little or no factual basis and could not reflect the eras in which they were set. Simultaneously, discoveries in the Near East began to reveal an enormous wealth of first hand evidence about those biblical times. Some Christians hailed them as proof that the Bible is true and some still echo that cry to-day. Others argued that the ancient remains did not affect the conclusions of literary analysis and the history of religions scheme, the 'higher criticism', and their descendants are shouting with renewed energy to-day. Can either party justify its claim? How do the Bible and archaeology relate to each other?

The Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible is available in manuscripts copied 1,000 years ago and in fragments copied 2,000 years ago, the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹ Its text, therefore, is the product of many generations' of scribes work and so liable to scribal errors. In fact, the scribes worked with remarkable care, as various details show.² Yet even if they copied the texts with great care, do those texts reflect reliably the events and circumstances of the ages they claim to describe? They survive as religious works and most were written from a religious perspective – the Song of Songs may be an exception. They were written to promote what may be called Israelite orthodoxy and so they are clearly biased; their authors would have admitted that, yet they would have maintained that their point of view was the true one and so their representation of past events was equally true. For them, those past events were history, history that was relevant to and affected their own situations. Clearly, if they were wrong, if they were deliberately creating false pictures, then any teachings they based upon them would have little value and no authority for anyone else, then or now.

¹ The amount of biblical text surviving in the Scrolls is indicated in M. Abegg, P. Flint & E. Ulrich, eds, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*, New York: HarperCollins (1999).

² See my essay 'In Praise of Ancient Scribes', *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982) 143-53.

Archaeology: Possibilities and Limitations

Modern archaeology is a complex activity, producing remarkable results that enable us to envisage past ages more accurately and more vividly than ever before. Yet with all its techniques, it has many limitations, most notably it cannot re-create ancient personalities, their thoughts or their languages, without written documents. Examination of an ancient pot may reveal the time of year when it was made – by the inclusion of grains, seeds or pollen – where it was made – by analysis of the clay – the minerals used in its painted decoration, the heat at which it was fired, perhaps what its function was and what it once contained. The name of the potter and his work-place, the precise year of manufacture, the price of the vessel and the name of its purchaser are beyond the scope of the material analysis. In the same way, a building may be identified as a temple, one of a known type, but the identity of the deity worshipped, the rituals performed and the priests responsible remain unknown. Where there is a brief written record, the situation changes. A simple inscription put on a Babylonian brick about 4,500 years ago illustrates the point. It says, ‘Ur-Nanshe, king of Lagash, son of Gunidu, built the temple of Ningirsu’.³ An archaeologist should be able to identify and give a date for the building which had this brick in its wall.

The Role of Written Records

The Bible is a written document, so whatever material remains may be found and related to it, other written documents are likely to provide the most precise information about its contents. Here is one example. Excavations at the site known as Sebastiyeh in the centre of the Holy Land during the 1930s recovered numerous pieces of carved ivory. They were not found *in situ* but in disturbed levels.⁴ Comparable pieces have been discovered at several sites in Syria and Iraq. In Iraq, especially at Nimrud, ancient Kalah, south of Nineveh, hundreds of pieces lay smashed in the ruins of buildings destroyed or abandoned. A stylistic correlation can be made between these groups of ivories, but nothing more precise can be established unless the evidence of written records is introduced. They reveal that all the sites were occupied by the Assyrians whose rule the Babylonians and Medes brought to an end in 612 B.C. Assyrian records boast of the capture of Samaria just over a century earlier and other sources explain that it was the ancient capital of Israel, renamed Sebaste by king Herod in the first century B.C. The ivories evidently belonged to the Israelite capital and, we may assume, more probably to the Israelite

³ J. S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Royal Inscriptions I, Presargonic Inscriptions*, New Haven: American Oriental Society (1986) 29, La 1.19.

⁴ See R. Tappy, *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria, II. The Eighth Century B.C.E.*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns (2001) 443-95.

palaces than to the Assyrian occupation. Here the role of the texts is essential in bringing precision to the understanding of the objects. With their evidence, the ivories can then be taken as examples of the decoration reported for king Ahab's palace in 1 Kings 22; 39 and for the mansions of wealthy Samaritans by the prophet Amos (3; 15).

Ancient records are full of the names of kingdoms and peoples. The Philistines are one of the few whose names are still current, as Palestine, and whose presence is established by archaeological excavations. At sites in the south-west of the Holy Land there are clear signs of a population with an intrusive material culture evidently related to the culture of the Aegean in the 13th and 12th centuries B.C. There is a distinctive ceramic repertoire beside the local one, curved iron knives, loom-weights like fat sausages, figurines and architectural features which have no precedents in the Near East. Egyptian inscriptions and biblical references led to the identification of these elements as relics of the Philistines.⁵ It seems to me the strength of this case has heightened the belief that an equally clear distinction should be possible in the case of the Israelites. However, the material remains from other parts of the country display no comparable changes. Ceramic forms of the Late Bronze Age continue into the Iron Age, and metal tools and weapons exhibit the same forms; there is little or no trace of a new population entering the land between 1300 and 1100 B.C. (The dates for the Exodus and the Conquest are best taken as falling in the 13th century B.C.) Consequently there is a growing chorus of scholars proclaiming that the Israelites were latter-day Canaanites, large numbers of whom supposedly moved from the towns in the valleys and coastal region to settle in the hills in the face of Egyptian oppression. I have discussed this matter in an earlier lecture.⁶ There I used the Amorites in Babylonia as an analogy. Those tribespeople moved into the land of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers from the north-west over several centuries, taking control about 2,000 B.C. Multitudes of contemporary documents attest their presence at every level of society, but no objects have been found, no buildings, no patterns which are recognizably new to the area and so possibly Amorite rather than Babylonian. Here the similar situations with other peoples can be added. In 19th century B.C. merchants from Assyria set up trading centres in many parts of Anatolia. At one in particular, ancient Kanesh, modern Kultepe, north-east of Kayseri, they abandoned their houses, leaving behind their business documents written on clay tablets. Over 25,000 cuneiform tablets have been unearthed there

⁵ See T. Dothan & M. Dothan, *People of the Sea. The Search for the Philistines*, New York: Macmillan (1992).

⁶ 'Were the Israelites really Canaanites?' in J. K. Hoffmeier & A. R. Millard, eds, *The Future of Biblical Archaeology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2004) 136-48.

and they reveal the presence of people bearing Indo-European names in Anatolia at that time; nothing in the domestic utensils or architecture displays any feature that can be characterized as Indo-European. Slightly later, the kingdom of Mitanni arose in Upper Mesopotamia which had a large population of people called Hurrians, but the language of the names of the rulers of Mitanni is Indo-Aryan (related to Sanskrit). No reputable scholar separates Indo-European from Hurrian material, or can definitely divide Hurrian products from the general range of north Mesopotamian material. The best that can be said is that certain styles became popular in that area at that time. It is mistaken, therefore, to deduce that the absence of identifiably Israelite remains in the Holy Land in the last two centuries of the 2nd millennium B.C. means that there was no change of population, that Canaanites became Israelites. The archaeological evidence is not at odds with the biblical, it is the current interpretation which needs re-assessment.

Testing the Texts

Archaeological discoveries can often illuminate the contents of ancient texts and help in verifying their statements by revealing whether or not certain customs or artefacts were current at the times the texts indicate, whether or not the texts contain anachronisms. One significant example is the armour of the giant Goliath. A prominent Egyptologist wrote a book *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times* a few years ago in which he asserted that the armour Goliath wore is 'late', that is to say, is of a type that belongs to the seventh century B.C., or after, and so cannot realistically describe the equipment of a Philistine warrior of the eleventh century B.C. It is a 'blatant anachronism'.⁷ The description of Goliath's armour and weapons is given in 1 Samuel 17: 5,6. He had 'a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of bronze scale-armour which weighed five thousand shekels. On his legs he had bronze greaves and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels.' In that passage there occur four times the word 'bronze' and once the word 'iron'. The ratio of those words to each other gives a valuable clue to the age of the equipment. If the history of Goliath had been invented in the seventh century B.C., or later, the proportion of metals would be strange. By that date, the armour and weapons of a champion would be made entirely of iron; bronze was old-fashioned, although still used. Assyrian weaponry makes that clear. There were coats of scale armour of iron beside the older bronze fashion, helmets of iron beside bronze ones and iron spearheads. On the contrary, in the eleventh century B.C. bronze was the normal

⁷ D. B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1992) 305.

metal, iron was new and uncommon, limited to special uses, so its limitation to the point of a spear is understandable.⁸ Would an author writing four hundred years later know these facts? That seems unlikely. The accuracy of the account of Goliath in such a detail, suggests that it is a reliable report of an event in the eleventh century B.C. throughout.

The same holds for the iron bedstead of Og, king of Bashan, and for the iron chariots of the Canaanites; the material of which they were made would not be worthy of comment unless it was unusual. Iron in the Late Bronze Age was known and used in small quantities, but it was rare and costly, so would invite attention.⁹

Another 'blatant anachronism' the same writer discerned in the books of Samuel is the use of coined money. He cites two passages. The first sets the prices for refurbishing agricultural tools at two thirds or one third of a shekel, 'Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines said, "Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears!" So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their ploughshares, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened. The price was two thirds of a shekel for sharpening ploughshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and for repointing goads' (1 Sam. 13: 19-22). The second passage is Joab's offer of ten shekels of silver to the man who saw Absalom hanging by his hair from a tree and the man's reply that one thousand shekels would not persuade him to kill the king's son (2 Sam. 18:11-12). In Hebrew the first passage mentions neither shekels nor silver, having only 'the price was two thirds (*pym*)...one third (*shlsh*)'. The second passage has 'ten of silver' and 'one thousand of silver'. The Hebrew text does not include the word for 'shekel', a linguistic feature (ellipsis) also common in business transactions of the second millennium B.C. in the Levant at Alalakh and Ugarit, at the latter site both in

⁸ Bronze scale armour was found at Nuzi, R. F. S. Starr, *Nuzi* (1930) 475ff, mentioned in texts and discussed by T. Kendall, '*gurpisu sa aweli*: The Helmets of the Warriors at Nuzi', in M. A. Morrison, D. I. Owen, eds, *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians In Honor of Ernest R. Lacheman*, Winona Lake, IN, Eisenbrauns (1981) 201-31; illustrated in Egypt, see Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson (1963) 196-97. Iron scale armour was found at Nimrud, see M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains* (London: Collins (1966) 409-11; D. Stronach, 'Metal Objects from the 1957 Excavations at Nimrud', *Iraq* 20 (1958) 169-81, especially 172-74. Bronze scales were found at Lachish in the level associated with Sennacherib's attack, see D. Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib*, Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology (1982) 55-56.

⁹ See my essays 'King Og's Bed and other Ancient Ironmongery.' In L. Eslinger, G. Taylor, eds, *Ascribe to the Lord. Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1988) 481-91 and 'Back to the iron bed: Og's or Procrustes' ? In J. A. Emerton, ed., *Congress Volume, Paris 1992, Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 61, Brill: Leiden (1995) 193-203.

Akkadian and in Ugaritic texts.¹⁰ The shekel being the basic unit of currency across the ancient Near East, there was no need to mention it in every case, it was understood, other units, such as the talent, were named.

Payment was made by weighing the silver, as the man expressed to Joab, 'Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands...' An earlier passage is very specific, Genesis 23: 16, 'Abraham agreed to Ephron's terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants'. Hoards of silver bullion have been recovered from various sites in the Holy Land and elsewhere, made up of pieces cut from rings, ingots and lumps. There are no grounds at all for assuming that coinage, which did not appear until the seventh century B.C. at the earliest, was envisaged in either passage in the books of Samuel.

In contrast, books dealing with the Persian period do have references to coined money. Ezra and Nehemiah speak of thousands of drachmas of gold given for restoration work in Jerusalem (Ezra 2: 69; Neh. 7: 70, 71). 1 Chronicles 29: 7 reports that the leaders of Israel gave to David 5,000 darics for building the Temple. While this is, strictly, anachronistic, it is intelligible that a book written in the Persian period should use a current denomination.

The use of shekels, their multiples and their fractions as units of currency, silver weighed, not coined, was normal across the ancient Near East. Inscribed Hebrew stone weights of the seventh century attest a standard system, perhaps introduced by Hezekiah. Among the weights are some for 2/3 of a shekel, marked *payim*, the word found in 1 Samuel 13: 21 as the price the Philistines charged for sharpening Israel's iron tools. (The Hebrew of that verse was unintelligible until the discovery of weights marked *pym* a century ago.) To allege that use of fractions implies coined money and so is an anachronism is without any justification at all; fractions of the shekel are normal in cuneiform documents from the early second millennium B.C. onwards. The occurrence of the Hebrew weights marked *payim* in the seventh century only does not imply the unit had no earlier existence as a weight.¹¹

Through the middle decades of the last century there was a widespread

¹⁰ D. J. Wiseman, *The Alalakh Tablets*, London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara (1953), see p.13., e.g. nos 66-68,70-72, 93, 100; E.g. C. Virolleaud, *Textes en cunéiformes alphabétiques des Archives Est, Ouest et Centrales, Palais Royal d'Ugarit* 2, Paris: Klincksieck (1957), no. 6, lines 13,14; no. 18, line 21; J. Nougayrol, 'Textes Suméro-accadiens des Archives et Bibliothèques privées d'Ugarit' in C. F. A. Schaeffer, ed., *Ugaritica* V, Paris: Geuthner (1968) no. 27, lines 8, 12ff; no. 51, lines 9, 12; no. 86, line 16.

¹¹ For the stone weights see now R. Kletter, *Economic Keystones. The Weight System of the Kingdom of Judah*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1998).

opinion that texts from various sites showed that the activities of the Patriarchs fitted well with the social customs of the second millennium B.C. Accordingly, the narratives in Genesis could be treated as reflecting that time. The consensus was challenged in 1974 and 1975 by the books of T. L. Thompson and J. van Seters.¹² Those publications have formed the basis for a new consensus that the lives of the Patriarchs cannot be treated as reflections of the second millennium B.C., but rather of the first, consequently they are not historical but fictitious, for the biblical chronology places them before Israel's settlement in Canaan. Although a volume of essays and various other studies have renewed the case for a second millennium dating, taking into account the arguments of Thompson and van Seters,¹³ their views have gained widespread acceptance. This is a case of failure to allow adequately for alternatives. The arguments from the ancient documents rest mainly on the fact that behaviour similar to that of the Patriarchs is attested in the first millennium B.C. That could only tilt the balance toward a first millennium date for the Genesis traditions if such behaviour were to be proved to be impossible in the second millennium. That is not the case. It is inevitable that pastoral nomadic families, like Abraham's, living in the same regions and under comparable conditions, should conduct their lives in similar ways throughout the centuries, even the millennia, until the arrival of motorized transport and electricity. When there are similarities between texts of the second and the first millennia B.C. and the accounts in Genesis, it may be advisable to associate the Hebrew narratives with the earlier date in preference to the later because the biblical texts themselves imply the earlier date.

Should Archaeology have Priority?

The preference given to the later date for the Patriarchal Narratives is the result, of course, of adherence to the source analysis of the Pentateuch which places no texts earlier than 1,000 B.C. That is one of the main tenets underlying the recent book by the Tel Aviv archaeologist Israel Finkelstein and the writer Neil Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*.¹⁴ Building upon the assumption that the book of Deuteronomy

¹² T. L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: the Quest for the Historical Abraham*, Berlin: de Gruyter (1974); J. van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, New Haven: Yale University Press (1975).

¹³ A. R. Millard & D. J. Wiseman, eds, *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press (1980), reprinted, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, (1983); cf J. K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, New York: Oxford University Press (1997).

¹⁴ I. Finkelstein & N. A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*, New York: Free Press (2001).

was the Book of the Law found in the Temple in the days of king Josiah, about 620 B.C., and that it had been written only a few years earlier, they believe that none of the Hebrew books written in the same style can be older and so the books of Kings, for example, do not preserve reliable reports of events in previous centuries. That is an assumption which can be challenged. There is no good reason to limit the so-called 'deuteronomistic style' to the seventh century or later. The style could have originated in a much earlier century and be maintained for long afterwards. Assyrian royal inscriptions give clear examples of that process. The 'annals' of Tiglath-pileser I (c. 1114-1076 B.C.) are written in a style which is little different from the style of the 'annals' of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal written four centuries later, and other kings' annals of the intervening centuries show the same features. Those are not only stock phrases and formulae, but include the ideology of kingship and the theology of Assyria. Among the most important aspects is the concept of the faithfulness of the parties to a treaty. Many examples of treaties drawn up by Hittite kings of Anatolia from the sixteenth to the thirteenth centuries B.C. survive which have as their main purpose the maintenance of good relations between the Hittites and their neighbours and allies in Turkey and Syria.¹⁵ Although there are no Assyrian treaties from that period, the Assyrian royal inscriptions reflect them. The loyalty of the treaty partners would result in peace and prosperity, with assurance of mutual aid in times of trouble. Breach of the treaty by a junior partner would result in a punitive attack by the superior one, who might remove him from his throne and exile or execute him. Now if the authors of Assyrian royal propaganda and of Hittite treaties could conceive these possibilities, then a Moses of the thirteenth century B.C. could do the same. The continuity of the ideas and the style in Assyria over several centuries until the fall of the kingdom (the Hittite empire disappeared soon after 1200 B.C.) offers a good analogy for the continuity of the 'deuteronomistic style' over several centuries in Israel, even if the language was modernized.

Finkelstein and Silberman began with another proposition beside the literary assumption, a proposition based upon archaeological research, for they wish to give priority to archaeological discoveries in writing a history of Israel. It is necessary to observe that extensive exploration and excavation has taken place in the Holy Land over the past 150 years, yet, unhappily, no royal inscriptions have been found like those of Assyria or Egypt. In fact, inscriptions on stone are rare, not one is known bearing the name of a king of Israel or of Judah. There are scores of ostraca, inscribed potsherds, carrying short messages in Hebrew which are valuable evidence for daily life and administration, but say nothing about kings or major events. Dating

¹⁵ Many are translated in G. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, Atlanta: Scholars Press (2nd ed. 1999).

ruined buildings and other remains unearthed in the *tells* of Israel and Judah depends ultimately upon correlations with historical records in other lands, or in the Bible. The distinction between pottery of one stratum and pottery of another can yield a relative sequence, not a precise chronology. Now Finkelstein argues that the Philistines with their decorated pottery did not settle in Philistia until after the reign of Ramesses VI (c. 1143-36 B.C.), whereas most scholars suppose that they took root there at least fifty years earlier. The decorated pottery, which belongs to a second phase of their occupation, he supposes began to become fashionable early in the eleventh century and continued in use into the tenth century. That means the subsequent strata, which do not have that pottery and which are currently set in the eleventh and tenth centuries, should be attributed to the late tenth and the ninth centuries.¹⁶ The strata that would then fall in the tenth century present rather meagre material, implying that there was no major power in the land, no great kingdom such as the Bible describes for David and Solomon. Regrettably, the book by Finkelstein and Silberman arising from the hypothesis about Philistine ceramics, sets out these ideas as assured facts, as the final verdict. Other archaeologists of equal experience with Finkelstein reject his ideas.¹⁷ The debate continues, but the hypothetical nature of the situation has to be recognized. Finkelstein's ceramic chronology appears to be too rigid, expecting identical forms to change at the same moment at every site.¹⁸ His contention that the Philistines did not settle in the south-west of Canaan until late in the twelfth century is very dubious. We note that Ramesses III already depicted the 'Sea People' moving with wagons and families through the Levant before 1175 B.C., so they could already have been settling there at that time, if not earlier. Finkelstein's arguments lead to the dating of the famous six-chambered gateways at Gezer, Hazor and Megiddo to the ninth century B.C., contradicting Yigael Yadin's dating to the time of Solomon. While many would be sad to see supposed evidence for Solomon's building work disappear, were the case watertight, there could be no objection to it. As it is not conclusive, those gates may still be attributed to the middle of the tenth century B.C., that is, to Solomon's reign.

¹⁶ Finkelstein first presented his hypothesis in 'The Date of the Settlement of the Philistines in Canaan,' *Tel Aviv* 22 (1995) 213-39 and 'The Archaeology of the United Monarchy: an Alternative View,' *Levant* 28 (1996) 177-87.

¹⁷ A. Mazar, 'Iron Age Chronology: A Reply to I. Finkelstein,' *Levant* 29 (1997) 156-67; A. Ben-Tor, 'Hazor and the Chronology of Northern Israel: A Reply to Israel Finkelstein,' *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 317 (2000) 9-16, and more recent papers in various journals.

¹⁸ See S. Ortiz, 'Deconstructing and Reconstructing the United Monarchy: House of David or Tent of David (Current Trends in Iron Age Chronology),' in J. K. Hoffmeier, A. R. Millard, eds, *The Future of Biblical Archaeology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2004) 121-47.

The Lack of Evidence for David and Solomon

Excavations in Jerusalem have failed to unearth any structures that can be credibly linked to Israel's two most famous kings. Some may express surprise at the absence of any monuments to David or Solomon. First, it is necessary to observe that there is still a city of Jerusalem, so only certain areas can be excavated and in some parts the actions of previous generations have removed all earlier remains down to bedrock. The most extensive archaeological work has been done along the flanks of the 'City of David' or 'Ophel' hill where the slopes are so steep that much of the debris of early cities will have rolled down the hill or been swept away by later builders. Second, it is pertinent to record that there are very few West Semitic inscriptions of kings in the Levant from the tenth century. The only ones known come from the port city of Byblos. One is the funerary inscription of king Ahirom, incised on the lid of his sarcophagus and found in his tomb. The others all relate to the temple of the 'Lady of Byblos', but only one was found *in situ*. These inscriptions name six kings of Byblos, all to be placed between about 1,000 and 880 B.C. Many other kings ruled in the towns of the Levant during those years, yet no original inscriptions survive from any of them. The absence of inscribed monuments of David or of Solomon is not surprising and cannot be used to prove they were powerful kings, local chieftains, or fictional figures. As I have remarked before, the total absence from Palestine of monumental inscriptions of King Herod does not reveal anything about the extent of his power.

The existence of king David is now supported by evidence from outside the Bible. Fragments of a stele inscribed in Aramaic found at Tel Dan in 1993 and 1994.¹⁹ The shapes of the letters suggest a date between 850 and 800 B.C. The text recounts a victory won by a king whose name is lost, but who was very likely Hazael of Damascus, and who claims the god Hadad supported him. He boasts of the defeat of a king of Israel whose name may be restored as [Jeho]ram son of [Ahab]. That name is followed by another which has been restored as [Ahaz]iah, son of [Jehoram], that is, the king of Judah. There are strong reasons for expressing uncertainty about that restoration; only the ending of the king's name, *-yahu* (= *-iah*) remains on the stone and the father's name is lost and the resulting syntax would be peculiar. The most significant letters stand at the start of the ninth line: *k.bytdwd*. The first letter belongs to the last word of the previous line, which is missing; the frequently

¹⁹ B. Mazar, J. Naveh, 'An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan', *IEJ* 43 (1993) 81-98, 'The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment', *IEJ* 45 (1995) 1-18; A. Millard, 'The Tell Dan Stele' in W. W. Hallo & K. L. Younger, eds, *The Context of Scripture 2. Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*, Leiden: Brill (2000) 161-62.

offered restoration 'king'([m/]k) is doubtful. The next six letters spell 'House of David'. The formulation, 'House of X', was frequently used to designate a dynasty in Assyrian and Aramaic in the early first millennium B.C., the personal name being the name of the founder of the dynasty, so there is no reason to doubt that the reference here is to the ruling house in Jerusalem, founded by David. It is very unlikely there was another ruling house of that name in the Near East at that time and other explanations offered, some of them deliberate attempts to avoid the clear sense of the inscription, have little support.

"Archaeology and the Bible: friends or foes' – these few examples are intended to illustrate different ways in which archaeological discoveries may be related to the biblical text, how wrong deductions can easily be made, how other presuppositions affect the interpretations placed upon the discoveries and how much attention needs to be paid to every facet of each topic. The material remains, the walls, utensils, pottery vessels can never provide precise information; the wall cannot proclaim 'King Y built me', nor the sword declare the name of its smith, nor the pot the year it was formed. These things are neutral, neither friends nor enemies. It is the texts that bring the precision the historian seeks. Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions supply exact details about several episodes recorded in the books of Kings and it is a remarkable fact that in each case where they name a king of Israel or a king of Judah, the names occur in the same sequence and at the same chronological points as they do in the Hebrew text. The extra-biblical witnesses agree with the biblical. Further, wherever extra-biblical texts report the same events as biblical texts, they are harmonious; there is no case of downright contradiction. (A recent attempt to demonstrate disagreement between biblical and extra-biblical texts has been proved to be faulty, based upon insufficient knowledge of the sources.²⁰)

The conclusion is clear, the Bible and archaeology are not enemies, they are, rather, friends. It is misguided interpretations that make them appear to be hostile to each other.

²⁰ Compare L. L. Grabbe, 'Are Historians of Palestine Fellow Creatures – or Different animals?' in L. L. Grabbe, ed., *Can a "History of Israel" be Written?* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1997) 19-36, with the rebuttal by V. P. Long, 'How Reliable are the Biblical Reports? Repeating Lester Grabbe's Comparative Experiment,' *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002) 367-84.